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ENVOY GIVES ACCOUNT OF MEETING WITH CASTRO  
BY GEORGE GEDDA  
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By Fidel Castro's count, the CIA has tried on 25 occasions to assassinate him.

Yet when Castro met secretly with Vernon Walters, a former deputy director of the CIA, for six hours 2 1/2 years ago, there was surprisingly little acrimony.

"It was very cordial," Walters recalled in an interview. "There was no sense of hostility. He has respect for people who believe in their ideals. He scorns Americans who are ashamed of being American."

Walters, who has served as ambassador-at-large for the past three years, met with Castro in Havana on March 5, 1982. It was a time when the United States, under strong pressure from Mexico, was trying to seek an accommodation with both Cuba and Nicaragua.

The American and Cuban governments agreed not to disclose that the meeting had taken place but word of it leaked out shortly afterward in Europe. Walters elaborated on the few details about the encounter that have filtered out.

Walters was the No. 2 official at the CIA from 1972-76, following the period in which the agency's attempts on Castro's life are alleged to have occurred. In contrast to Castro's claims, a Senate committee investigation 10 years ago concluded that the Cuban president was the target of eight CIA-sponsored assassination plots.

Walters said the meeting did not result in any narrowing of Cuban-American differences.

"He (Castro) held firm to his ideas," Walters said. "He made plain that he was an intellectually convinced communist, that he had been one since he was 17 years of age."

Some Cuba analysts believe Castro converted to Marxism after the revolution but Walters said he has no doubt that Castro's own account is the correct one.

Walters said Castro, at 21, was in Bogota, Colombia, in 1948 during a violent political uprising that coincided with a meeting of Organization of American States foreign ministers.

Ironically, Walters was there himself, serving as an aide to then Secretary of State George Marshall.

Castro, Walters said, "was on the radio exhorting people to break into the arms stores and take arms."

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